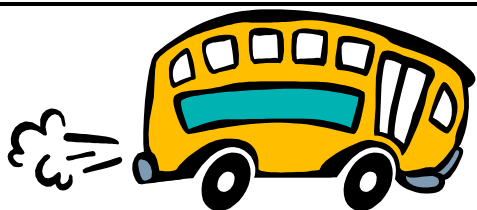




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**Montana Pupil Transportation
News and Updates
April 2002**



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A Monthly Newsletter Published by Pupil Transportation, School Budgeting and Accounting Division

If You Missed The New Pupil Transportation Web Site Last Month, Here It Is Again...

Go to www.opi.state.mt.us select <Pupil Transportation> from the drop down menu of Programs and Services at OPI. From the new web site, you can email the director, link to MAPT, read the proposed standards, catch the news, access all the NEW FORMS, check out other state directors and activities, read the law, and access the Transportation Handbook issued in 2001. If there is anything that you would like to see on the site, please feel free to email me at mmougeot@state.mt.us with your suggestions.

Do you have questions about the Bus Depreciation fund, Transportation fund or other school finance issues? While you are in OPI's web site listed above, Click the tab at the top titled <Get Answers>. Under <Product> type in *school finance* and under <Search Text> type in *bus depreciation fund*.

New TR-1 and TR-4 Forms Are In The Mail and On the Web

Pupil Transportation has a new accounting and data management system. The new programming requires a change in the arrangement of data entry cells; therefore we made some changes to the TR-1 and TR-4 forms. We have tried to eliminate unnecessary data elements, clarify those elements that weren't as clear as possible, and also tried to arrange all new forms so there is more room available for typing or writing in the data.

I know that some of you have computerized the forms you use and it will take some extra effort on your part to make these changes. At this time, please feel free to continue to use your computerized forms. Our goal is to have the new forms on-line in printable format, to pre-fill at least all district information, bus and contract information and eventually to have pre-filled forms on-line so a district only has to update and submit.

I am excited about all of the changes that are being made to the transportation accounting and data management system. Eventually district personnel will be able to enter data, calculate reimbursement amounts, check on driver certificates and bus inspections, calculate daily rates for

Individual Contracts and see the total amounts reimbursed by the state. There won't be any surprises and there shouldn't be any errors.

Do You Need Help Advertising Vacant Transportation Positions?

School Bus Fleet magazine would like to know if there are any job openings for directors, supervisors or other school transportation personnel in our state. As an added resource to their readers, School Bus Fleet magazine would like to publicize the openings and help ease the shortage of labor. If there are any notable position openings that you are aware of in Montana, please reply to the address below with more information. Any input would be very much appreciated. Feel free to respond with any questions or concerns to:

Joey Campbell
Assistant Editor, School Bus Fleet Magazine
21061 S. Western Avenue
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 533-2589, FAX (310) 533-2502

Since You Asked

Do you know where I can find bid and procurement information? We want to buy a new bus.

<http://www.discoveringmontana.com/doa/doa/divisions.htm>

Click on <Procurement and Printing>.

Exactly what can we use the Bus Depreciation Fund for?

MCA 20-10-147 Bus Depreciation Reserve Fund. When a district owns a bus or two-way radio for purposes of transportation, as defined in 20-10-101, or for purposes of conveying pupils to and from school functions or activities, they may establish a bus depreciation reserve fund. This fund can be used for conversion, remodeling or rebuilding of a bus or for the replacement of a bus (includes replacing an activity bus) or radio. The district may also use this fund for purchase of an additional yellow school bus used for transportation.

Does the Highway Patrol inspect fire extinguishers that we are required to keep in the school bus when they do the bus inspections?

No. A representative of the State Fire Marshall's office said that the fire code requires that authorized personnel inspect fire extinguishers once per year. If you have questions you can call the State Fire Marshall's general number, (406) 444-2050. The assistant will forward you to the appropriate specialist.

MAPT Conference Information

The Montana Association for Pupil Transportation has sent out the registration forms for the June 19-21, 2002 Conference to be held at the Belgrade High School and Special Events Center. The conference title is "Driving to Protect You in 2002." Registration is due to Linda Michel at MAPT by June 1st. The registration fee is \$70 if paid by June 1.

Conference information was included in the OPI mailing for March. If you need additional copies of any of the materials, just send me an email at mmougeot@state.mt.us. Conference events include First Aid and Driver Training, School Bus Road-e-o, Vendor presentations, Bar-B-Que, Smoke Filled Bus Evacuation and many interesting workshop sessions and speakers. I look forward to seeing you there. Sign up early and get the discount.

STN Expo and Trade Show in Reno, Nevada

Conference dates are July 27-31, 2002 in Reno Nevada. The conference is held at the Reno Hilton each year. The conference schedule, travel and hotel information, registration and any other information you may need is available at <http://www.stnonline.com>.

In The News

The National Transportation Safety Board, Opposed to Childcare Vans, Adds Case to Inquiry

By James W. Brosnan

WASHINGTON -- The National Transportation Safety Board will investigate Thursday's fatal van crash in Memphis as part of an ongoing look at the safety of the large passenger vans used by many day care centers and churches.

In 1999, the safety board faulted states for not requiring Head Start and day care programs to transport children in regular or small school buses. Such vehicles must be built with stronger sides and roofs than vans like the 15-passenger Ford E350 involved in Thursday's crash.

"We're looking at this issue of 15-passenger vans," said safety board spokesman Ted Lopatkiewicz. "We have ongoing investigations involving accidents over the last year and a half."

One of the five safety board members, George Black, and an investigator, Gary Van Etten, were scheduled to be in Memphis by this morning.

Former NTSB chairman Jim Hall of Chattanooga said he initiated an investigation of the large passenger vans and specialty buses in the late 1990s. "They're used in lieu of school buses, which are federally designed and regulated vehicles for the transportation of children. School buses have to meet very rigid standards," said Hall. "The 15-passenger van is just a commercial vehicle. Many times it is just a basic shell on an engine frame. It is used as a low-cost alternative for private schools and for day care trips."

School buses have strengthened side joints and a cage-like structure to support the roof in the event of a rollover. The seats have to have high backs and padding.

State officials don't know how many large passenger vans are used to transport day care children in Shelby County, only that they are quite common. Many churches use them too, and so do some schools when transporting children to extracurricular events.

Beginning in 1998, the safety board investigated four accidents over 11 months involving large vans or other special non-bus vehicles that resulted in the deaths of eight children and one adult and injuries to 36 people.

On March 25, 1998, in Sweetwater, Fla., three children were ejected from a 15-passenger van and sustained head injuries. A day later, two people died when a 25-passenger specialty-bus taking children from a school event in Lenoir City, Tenn., collided with a truck.

On Dec. 8, 1998, in Dublin, Ga., one child was killed when a Head Start van collided with a pickup truck. And on Feb. 16, 1999, in Bennettsville, S.C., six children died when a tow truck struck their church's 15-passenger van.

There's no way to know if the children who died in Thursday's crash would have survived if they had been riding in a bus. But the safety board concluded that all the children in the accidents it investigated for the 1999 report probably would have lived had they been in a school bus.

"When states and various school systems allow children to be transported in vehicles not meeting federal school bus construction standards, the federal intent of protecting schoolchildren is undermined," the report said. Only a handful of states require school buses for day care and Head Start transportation, and Tennessee is not among them. The board recommended that states require any vehicle used to transport 10 or more children from school, camp or day care centers or for similar purposes to meet the same federal safety standards applicable to small school buses.

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Administrative Rules of Montana 10.7.110 (1) Standards for School Buses states in part, "Motor vehicles designed to carry 10 or fewer persons do not meet the definition of a school bus and are not eligible for route reimbursement. To be eligible for reimbursement, motor vehicles that carry more than 10 persons must meet the school bus standards set by the Board of Public Education for school buses in Montana and must pass semiannual inspection by the Montana Highway Patrol.

School Transportation News provides the following article on the Use of Non-Conforming Vans

Vans in School Transportation Service

"School buses provide the United States with an estimated 10 billion student rides annually. The use of vans for athletic trips and other extra curricular school activities is a hot issue in school transportation. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration refers to these small passenger vans, while used in school transportation service, as "non-conforming." The phrase non-conforming van arises principally from two conditions.

First, the fact that passenger vans (generally carrying eight to 15 passengers) are not manufactured to the same stringent federal motor vehicle safety standards as traditional yellow school buses. For example, FMVSS 111, 131, 220, 221 and 222 are not required in the manufacture of vans. As a result these vehicles do not provide the same degree of occupant protection to passengers that school buses do.

Second, when these vans are used in school service, whether for regular route service or, more commonly, for activity or athletic trips, they do not conform to federal law which requires that children being transported in vehicles in school service must meet several federal safety standards. Hence the term non-conforming. Automobile manufacturers and dealers are prohibited from selling these vans into school service.

Schools use vans to transport staff, teachers, and other personnel around. While this is a perfectly legal use of these vehicles, the dilemma arises if the same vehicle is used to transport students. That is an illegal use of the van. The issue has long been troubling for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the federal agency charged with enforcing school bus safety laws. For more than two decades the agency has issued numerous warnings against the use of non-conforming vans.

NHTSA reports that from 1993 through 1999, there were at least 71 non-collision van rollovers, causing 126 fatalities. Those accidents included passenger and cargo vans.

In mid 1997, after decades of inaction, the agency initiated legal proceedings against six automobile dealers it alleges knowingly violated the law by selling vans to school clients, for student transportation use.

In the late 1990s, a \$1 million out-of-court settlement was reached in a case involving a non-conforming van in Columbia, South Carolina. There, six-year-old Jacob Strebler was killed when the non-conforming van in which he was being transported on an activity trip was struck broadside by a truck. The settlement went against the car dealership that sold the van to the private school Jacob was attending, and the private school Jacob was attending."

[This article lists the following 15-passenger vans as non-conforming: Chevy Express, Ford Econoline, Ford Club Wagon, Dodge Ram Wagon and Van, GMC Savana and Rally/Vandura.] "Source: STNonline.com. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. All rights reserved."



School Bus Recalls

Recall 00V-360 involves Thomas Conventional and Vista school buses manufactured from 1977 through 2000 with a storage compartment overhead to the left of the driver's seat. These units fail to meet FMVSS No. 222, School Bus Passenger Seating and Crash Protection". Customers involved will be notified directly by Thomas. Customers can contact their dealers to arrange for repairs to be made.

PROMPTLY RETURN TRAINING VIDEOS

IMPORTANT DATES

April 25, 2002 Second Semester TR-5's and TR-6's mailed from the OPI to districts

May 10, 2002 Second Semester TR-5's and TR-6's due from districts to county superintendent

May 24, 2002 Second Semester TR-5's and TR-6's due from county superintendents to the OPI

May 25, 2002 TR-13's (Bus Inspection Form) mailed to Districts

June 19, 20, 21, 2002 MAPT Conference in Belgrade, Montana

June 25, 2002 Second Semester Transportation payment sent to Counties

Update driver certificates, bus inspection forms, route information and contracts regularly.